

A Churchill Letter in Support of the Anti-Bolshevik Forces in Russia in 1919

Introduction by Witold S. Sworakowski

SOME time ago the Hoover Institution at Stanford University acquired in France the personal papers of Louis Loucheur, a French statesman who was a member of several cabinets during and after World War I. As Minister of Armaments during the last two years of the war he contributed greatly to the victory of France and her allies. As Minister of Reconstruction after the armistice he also exerted considerable influence in the cabinet.

Among Loucheur's papers are eleven letters and two telegrams from Winston Churchill, of which the one dated 21st November 1919 is of special importance. It deals with the question of support by the victorious powers of the anti-Bolshevik forces in Russia. The letter's historical significance lies in the fact that it discloses Churchill's efforts to induce the French government with Loucheur's help, to oppose the policy of the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, in whose cabinet Churchill was then serving as Minister of War.

The heading of the letter carries the words "Private and Confidential," and in the closing sentences Churchill asks Loucheur to treat the letter "not as an expression of ministerial opinion but as the private reflections of an English friend with whom you worked in the war."

The letter—reprinted in full—speaks for itself. However, it may be helpful to remind the reader of the general situation of that period and to point out the sharp conflict of opinions between Lloyd George and Churchill concerning Russia.

The results of the French elections to the Chamber of Deputies, held on November 16, 1919, prompted Churchill to write this letter to Loucheur. Those elections took place in an atmosphere of bitter struggle between two political blocs whose patriotic cooperation during the war had assured the French national unity that made victory possible.

The *Bloc National* included the rightist parties led by Clemenceau, Millebrand, Poincaré, and Briand. The *Cartel des Gauches*, led by Herriot, included the center and left-of-center parties with some socialist support. The socialists were at that time considerably weakened by internal dissent, especially because of the growing pressure of their left wing, which eventually split off to form the Communist Party. In the November election the *Bloc National* was vic-

torious and received a strong majority in the Chamber. The elections to the Senate in January 1920 confirmed the dominant role of this *Bloc*. Loucheur was a prominent member of the victorious side and when Churchill wrote his letter he was well aware that Loucheur's wartime prominence assured him of a strong voice in the future cabinet in which he served as Minister of Reconstruction. Churchill also knew that his and Loucheur's views on the Bolshevik danger were identical. He therefore attempted to persuade Loucheur to use his influence and prestige so as to change the attitude of the new French government in favor of support of the anti-Bolshevik forces.

Churchill's speeches and writings of 1919 clearly show that he had a better understanding of the Russian problem and the Bolshevik danger than the prime minister under whom he served. Lloyd George was aware of the German danger and after Brest-Litovsk approached Russian affairs only from the point of view of the advantages which this treaty might give to the Germans. In his memoirs he made this quite clear: "We were not organising and subsidising an anti-Bolshevik campaign, but an anti-German front."¹ After the collapse of Germany Lloyd George was eager to leave Russia to her own destiny because "we had fought to establish the right of every nation to control its own destiny without dictation from outside."²

In February 1919, with Lloyd George and President Wilson absent from Paris, Churchill made his famous appearance at the peace conference, asking for a full-scale crusade against Bolshevism. He was immediately disavowed by Lloyd George. In April the Prime Minister touched on the matter of aid to the anti-Bolshevik forces in a speech in the House of Commons in which he agreed to continue to support General Denikin and Admiral Kolchak. But Lloyd George's favorable attitude toward the anti-Bolshevik forces did not last long. Leftist pressures in parliament and the financial difficulties of the first post-treaty months convinced the Prime Minister to abandon further consideration of the Russian problem. The only strong opposition in the cabinet against this policy came from Churchill and Lord Curzon, the latter stubbornly limiting his support of anti-Bolshevik forces to aid for Georgia.

During the pre-electoral period the rightist ministers in the French government had taken an ambiguous position concerning Russia in order not to provide their leftist opponents with an electoral issue. However, Lloyd George's negative attitude concerning further intervention in Russia was made abundantly clear in his Guildhall speech of November 8, 1919 which was given at a time when Denikin was still advancing with his army toward Orel and Moscow, but when the defeat of Kolchak's forces seemed unavoidable, a situation that might not have been fully known to Churchill.

It was under these circumstances that Churchill wrote his letter to Loucheur, hoping that a radical change in the attitude of the French government toward Russia might force Lloyd George to revise his policy.

It is remarkable with what precision Churchill predicted in 1919 the

¹ David Lloyd George, *The Truth About the Peace Treaties*, London, Victor Gollancz, 1938, Vol. I, p. 316.

² *Ibid.*, p. 318.

rapprochement between Germany and Soviet Russia and its fatal consequences for Britain and France. Less than three years later, the Treaty of Rapallo (April 16, 1922) inaugurated German-Soviet cooperation, which at first developed into clandestine military relations but eventually culminated in the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact of August 23, 1939. This pact secured for the Soviet Union the return of a considerable part of the European areas that Russia had lost in World War I. It was exactly as Churchill had predicted, but with a tragic twist: At Teheran and Yalta an aging and changed Churchill cooperated in the return to the Soviet Union of some of the areas which his letter to Loucheur was intended to see prevented from falling under Soviet domination.

History repeats itself—but statesmen often reverse their course.

Private
&
Confidential



WAR OFFICE,
WHITTHALL,
S.W.1.

21st November, 1919.

I write to you because I am becoming increasingly anxious about the situation in Europe which, it seems to me, may develop in such a way as to affect not only the victory but the safety of England and France; and because we have talked over so many aspects of Anglo-French interests together during our collaboration in the war.

I heard with great regret from Mr. Lloyd George that the French Government has absolutely decided to cut off all supplies and assistance to the anti-Bolshevik Russians. I must say quite frankly that this appears to me to be a suicidal policy for France. If the Russian National forces get the upper hand and overthrow the Bolshevik regime after France has abandoned them, they will undoubtedly be animated by sentiments of lasting resentment towards the Entente Powers, in whose cause

they lost more than three million men. If, on the other hand, they are beaten, as is very likely, Europe will have to reckon with a mighty Jacobin military Empire rallying the National Russian spirit to recover Russian lopped-off provinces, and dividing the populations of the Entente countries by revolutionary propaganda fed by the financial resources of a powerful State. In either event these hostile Russian forces will look to Germany, where alone she can get the instructors and organisers to develop their military life and to rebuild their economic power. In Germany, on the other hand, there can only be one policy—to unite with Russia, either Bolshevik or anti-Bolshevik whichever comes uppermost. Russia can give back Germany everything she has lost. Munitions, man-power, raw material, markets, expansion; all can be found by Germany in Russia.

It was by the re-union of Russia and Germany that Napoleon was overthrown and Germany restarted on her career of world power in 1813. Must we go back to the days of Stein to illustrate and explain the present activities of Von der Goltz and Colonel Bermont in Courland? Against a Russo-German combination, England and France could never indefinitely maintain a war on land. And what is America going to do? Can you really base your national safety, and expect us to base ours, on the chance that the United States will send two or three million men to Europe on the next occasion and will get them there in time? I think it would be madness to trust to a factor so inscrutable. Understand, my friend, that I am not thinking of any immediate danger, but only of the dangers of five or ten years hence. I fear more than I can express the re-union of Russia and Germany, both determined to get back what they have lost in the war, the one through being our ally, the other through being our foe, and both convinced that acting together they will be irresistible.

What will be said of the victors of 1918 if, while such fateful issues are taking shape, they remain destitute of any policy, openly admitting that they have no policy; unable to state whether they are at peace or war with the Bolshevik Govern-

ment, watching enterprise after enterprise carried almost to the point of success by weak and feeble Russian forces with which they were associated, yet never giving the aid which would have rendered these efforts effective; and finally declaring, as the latest French communiqué has declared, "that England and France intended to make no more sacrifices for Russia."

I am young enough to have to look ahead so far as the future of my own country is concerned, and I am bound to say, speaking of the years which lie before us, that I should deeply regret to see England involved in such a hopeless situation. You gave me to understand some time ago that after the French elections there would be a possibility of a *révirement* of the policy of France towards the Russian problem, and I write to ask you to let me know whether this is so. It looks to a foreign but friendly observer as if the elections had resulted in the return of political forces soberly resolute to maintain the safety and revive the glories of France by means of patient and careful efforts. I cannot believe that a policy of "strafing" Germany into the arms of Russia and of leaving Russia "to stew in her own juice" is the last word which the political genius of France has to speak upon so terrible a matter. We ought, on the contrary, to do our utmost to make a success of the Socialist Government in Germany so that the German people will see that it is to their advantage to continue under such a Government: we ought to do our utmost to weave together and take the lead of all the anti-Bolshevik forces which now exist, and to give them the material and moral aid which they require and the political guidance of which they stand in such desperate need: we ought to try to bring about a good arrangement between the anti-Bolshevik Russian forces and the border States on a basis which will secure the greatest concentration against the Bolshevik tyranny: we ought to strengthen Poland in every way and promote a unity of action between Poland and the Russian National forces: we ought to direct our policy from a common point of view in these

matters and be ready to make sacrifices and exertions in whatever directions are necessary. In this way alone shall we succeed in taking those steps best calculated to ward off the formidable dangers which gather in the East.

I understand that a new Inter-Allied Conference is to be held upon the subject of Russia. It is very likely that this will be the last opportunity of dealing in a coherent manner with this problem.

I do trust that you will let me know your views and what you think is possible, treating this letter, of course, not as an expression of ministerial opinion but as the private reflections of an English friend with whom you worked in the war.

Yours sincerely,
Louis Brand. Churchill